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ABSTRACT

A theoretical model of cultural acquisition, the cultural proficiency model, is based on the premise that culture is learned, and can and should be learned in the language classroom. The model can be represented as a spiral continuum of awareness and behaviors; it is based on the premise that there can be no functional use of the second language without adequate manipulation of cultural skills. Particular functional skills to be addressed in the classroom of English as a second language (ESL) derived from this model are designated, and possible means of integrating cultural acquisition in the language classroom are discussed. Finally, skills needed to communicate effectively, as perceived by a small (n=36) random sample of bilingual and monolingual English speakers, are presented and ranked. It is concluded from the functional skills survey that a hierarchy of cultural and linguistic skills affecting communicative performance and classroom success, indicative of the urgency of acquisition of those skills and not of their natural order, may exist. The skills or factors found to influence effective communication include synthesis, an appropriate topic of conversation, proper grammar, eye contact, proper pronunciation, timing, physical distance, and hand gestures, in that descending order. The skills seen as influencing classroom success include planning, following directions, efficiency, inquiry, attention to detail, assertiveness, punctuality, and competition, in that descending order. (MSE)

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DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR CULTURAL PROFICIENCY IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the 80's, the ability to communicate in a second language had been traditionally oversimplified by eager teachers and linguists who reduced the process to an analytical venture. Emphasis on drills, memorization, and usage skills, in general, had made the teaching of second language, and of foreign languages, a useless experience for multiple generations of learners. However, current second language research trends have consistently produced massive evidence to support the necessity of developing second language for communicative purposes (Belasco, 1972, Finocchiaro, 1978, Widdowson, 1978, Rivers, 1980, Paulston, 1980, Canale and Swain, 1980, Savignon, 1983, among others). Nevertheless, communicative emphasis involves an angle which has either been bypassed or nebulously defined in contemporary second language literarure: the systematic inclusion of specific cultural skills in the teaching of the second language. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation

is fourfold: 1) to establish a theoretical model of cultural acquisition; 2) to designate the particular functional skills to be addressed in the ESL classroom; 3) to discuss possible means of integrating cultural acquisition in the language lesson; and 4) to establish a ranking order of skills needed to communicate effectively as perceived by a small random sample of bilingual and monolingual speakers of English.

Let the following true story serve as a starting point:

My uncle and his wife were traveling in New York City some 20 years ago and they were both wanting to visit the Wax Museum. Since my aunt's repertoire in English was non-existent, my "LEP" uncle took upon nimself to ask for directions. He approached a lady whom he had never seen before and who was peacefuly reading a newspaper in Central Park. After sitting really close to the lady, the following "exchange" took place:

UNCLE ROD: (Using his hands and facial gestures)
[ledi di bi prodiuses tu sins. guan is di honi an di oder is...]

LADY:(Stands up and hurriedly runs away from the scene looking back to make certain that the "weirdo" is not following...)

Needless to say, Uncle Rod was surprised by this outcome, as he was pretty confident that his English competence was adequate. In all fairness to Uncle Rod, we can say that his use of morphology was adequate--i.e. The bee produces...); his syntax appropriate--i.e., all his sentences

had the expected word order; and his vocabulary knowledge in place. However, he missed a few principles of communication typical of the U.S. culture: one does not sit that close to strangers; one does not use gestures so profusely ; and lastly, one does not "fill in blanks" at the park!!!It looks like Uncle Rod knew the mechanics but was not too well versed in the new meaning for the concepts of "timing" and place.

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY MODEL

Because speech involves both analytic as well as synthetic processes, this presentation, by no means, intends to minimize the need for mechanical competence in the second language--i.e., the knowledge of phonemes, of the accepted lexicon, of morphological and syntactic features. However, without a knowledge of which particular feature, and of how and when to use these features, adequate performance in the second language would rarely take place. Consequently, in order to provide the second language learner with the necessary cultural skills to perform in the second language, the "Cultural Proficiency Model" has been conceived. This model is based on the following theoretical premises:

1. Cultural patterns are learned behaviors which involve both competence--i.e.knowledge and understanding--as well as performance--i.e.,selection, feedback, and refinement. (Refer to figure 1).

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY MODEL

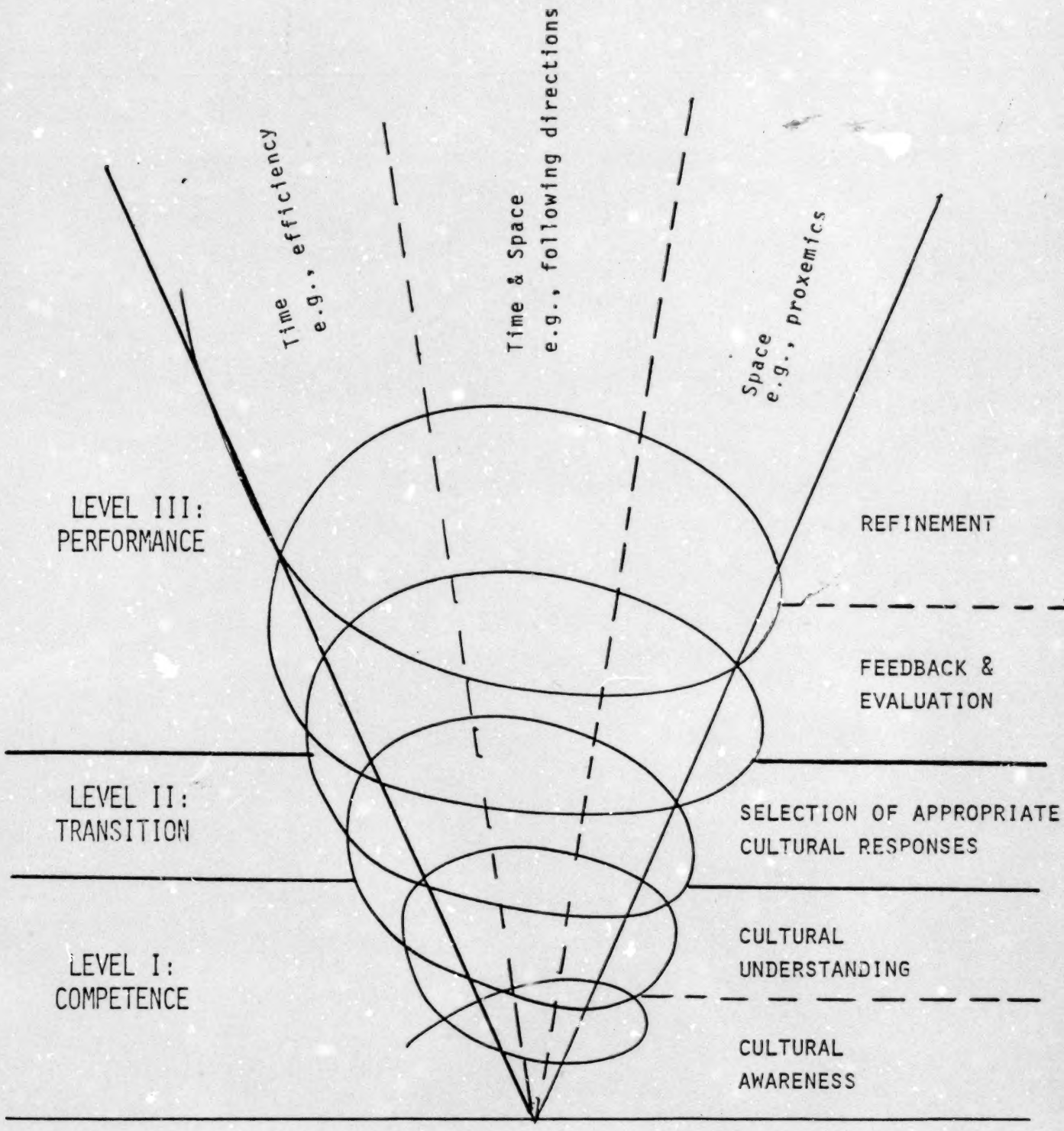


Figure 1

2. Specific behaviors typical of a particular culture can be, and should be, presented in the ESL classroom along with the language lesson.

3. Cultural acquisition requires constant and endless efforts to adjust since novel situations and cultural strategies are not finite. Consequently, an open ended method to generate appropriate cultural responses more than specific answers to expected problems must be developed in the second language learner.

4. Cultural acquisition can be represented in the form of a spiral continuum in order to provide for the two most frequent phenomena: progression to higher levels of awareness and behavior, as well as regression to lower stages. Most Bloomian approaches to language and cultural development provide for the hierarchical nature of acquisition but by presenting the stages in clear cut pyramidal entities, these approaches shortcircuit the back and forth movements within the continuum. In other words, speakers of the second language do not acquire a level of cultural proficiency once and for all. There is a constant presence of native value systems which at times interferes with the expected second culture behavior.

5. There can be no functional use of the second language without adequate manipulation of cultural skills. In essence, all cultural skills derive from two basic concepts: time and space. However, the manner in which these concepts are perceived varies dramatically from culture to culture.

CARLOS, A CASE HISTORY

The following case history will serve as an illustration of how the Cultural Acquisition Model operates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In looking at socialization patterns in the U.S., one observes that due to the high degree of mobility, it is most common among the native population to find themselves in a totally unfamiliar setting, further surrounded by unfamiliar faces. As a result, the skill of making oneself known to others develops to further the individual's social survival --e.g., relating to peers at school. Once a friendship is established, the "upkeep" requires acknowledging the other person's space by respecting her/his individuality; not overdoing favors since each must be returned; and mildly competing as well as disagreeing with your friend in order to provide him/her with supportive criticism.

THE SUBJECT:

Let us now look at a child from another culture and see how his perceptions of friendship might differ from the above unwritten norms of social interaction. Carlos is a fourteen year old from an upper middle class Salvadorean family. The only reason they have left their native country is due to political upheaval. The youngster speaks a little English but his Anglo peers do not know quite how to deal with him. They find Carlos too "pushy", too dependent, a "yes" man who does not know his way around girls. To say the least, his popularity among the native English speakers is not soaring,

so Carlos finds himself always in the company of his other Spanish speaking peers who seem to understand his ways a little better.

ANALYSIS:

However, a careful analysis of the events explains Carlos' image quite differently. First of all, Carlos comes from a less mobile environment; hence, his lack of ability in dealing with unfamiliar people and events. Back home he was friends with the same youngsters since an early age; therefore, he finds difficulty separating his identity from that of his peer group. Moreover, Carlos was taught that it was impolite and disloyal to disagree with his friends. Consequently, Carlos' repertoire of social skills are not in congruence with the new situation at hand.

TEACHER REAPONSIBILITY:

Since peer interaction is the singlemost important resource in second language learning, teachers must become aware of existing cultural conflicts in the classroom in an effort to hasten the process of social adjustment. Teachers can help the "Carloses" of the world in the following specific ways as outlined by the Cultural Proficiency Model.

THE METHOD:

At the awareness level, teachers can point out that making friends is not the same in all cultures. They must also show specific differences and encourage student input. In order to facilitate understanding, teachers must provide the reasons which explain those differences--e.g., mobility

factor, independence, competition, and so on. Once the students understand the underlying cultural phenomena which cause the difference in behavior, then they are ready to participate in simulation games which will bring real life into the classroom activity. Teachers and peers can help the ESL learners in the analysis and evaluation of events in order to equip these learners with a methodology to approach cultural conflict and not with a recipe to solve all the possible problems. The refinement stage results from further exposure to social interaction patterns.

RESULTS:

Obviously, this process expedites the cultural learning that would take place several years down the line and reduces the trauma of cultural adjustment and peer rejection. One important word of warning, this model does not advocate assimilatory practices by suggesting that learners adjust to the better culture. The model merely describes a viable route to provide the learners with valuable alternatives for action. Furthermore, in order to promote biculturalism, it is most crucial that teachers acknowledge the value inherent in the learner's cultural repertoire and simply add the new skills to be developed. We should not ignore the fact that some parents of the limited English speaking population are not cognizant of the value of special educational programs for their children. Therefore, parental conferences may be indispensable in order to increase the support of the learner's home environment.

INTEGRATING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS IN THE ESL CURRICULUM

Our present day classroom is a heavily task-oriented, "learn by doing" environment which, as a result, mostly caters to the inductive thinkers among our learners. Emphasis on details--e.g., "fill in the blanks", "multiple choice," and problem-solving activities--abound in the classroom techniques used with our children. However, these strategies involve a particular definition of time and its corollary , efficiency, which unfortunately does not possess transcultural validity.

Most children who descend from very traditional cultures which advocate the preservation of values and the importance of the spiritual dimension of man--e.g., the Indochinese, and the Hispanic--are trained in looking at the world as a totality which is to be accepted as such and further continued from generation to generation without any degree of questioning. Consequently, a deductive thinking pattern is likely to develop in these learners. On the other hand, inductive techniques--i.e., inquiry, problem-solving, following directions, sequencing, and summarization--are indeed derived from a value system that upholds efficiency, competition and change as acceptable patterns for success. Therefore, many ESL learners must become familiarized with such strategies prior to their use as a teaching/assessment tool. In training the students how to manipulate and understand these strategies, we are indeed exposing them to valuable cultural alternatives which will, in turn, allow

them to make a more successful acculturation to English as a second language.

In order to deal with these inductive techniques in the ESL classroom, the Cultural Proficiency Model can be applied. At the awareness and understanding levels, direct instruction is crucial in order to provide the learner with the background information necessary to later understand the cultural issues at stake. (Refer to figure 1). For example, explaining how concepts of time differ from culture to culture and how these differences of perception affect how people act can be introduced while the teacher is presenting morphology. It may be of interest to the students to contrast how English verb forms precisely express when action completion has taken place as opposed to Vietnamese non-inflected verb patterns. The teacher should further indicate that language forms reveal a particular philosophy of life of which acceptable cultural behavior is a direct outcome. By asking some of the learners to share how their dominant language deals with time and by having and enlightened class discussion, infusion of a very valuable cultural concept has taken place.

The transition level of the Cultural Proficiency Model, suggests the use of simulation and role playing techniques where students are encouraged to dramatize a scene involving any of the inductive skills cited earlier. Peer and teacher feedback is very desirable in helping the students evaluate their performance choices. The higher levels of the model

suggest direct exposure to the native environment which will naturally take place during the rest of their course of life in this culture. Therefore, activities which enhance inquiry, problem solving, summarization, sequencing, and following directions should be dealt with as suggested in the previous discussion.

Inquiry skills are indispensable to survive in a competitive, information-oriented society such as ours. Many cultures, however, not only de-emphasize their importance but even consider questioning rude and outlandish. Hispanic children are often taught at home not to challenge the opinions of others as their culture views this type of inquiry as an affront. Consequently, the ability of these children to respond naturally to situations which require the command of questioning skills may be lacking.

On the other hand, sequencing, summarization, and following directions also equip the ESL learners with the necessary survival skills to deal with innumerable day to day experiences. It comes as no surprise to the dominant English speaking of this country to purchase most commodities in pieces to be assembled before use. Hardly goes a day where we have not followed sets of instructions to accomplish the day's work. When flying, stewardesses give us directions as to how to save our lives in case of emergency. When playing, we must assemble the toy before we can enjoy it. As a consequence, our children develop the ability to sequence events, to plan, and to solve problems by transfering a set

of instructions to the task in hand. I have tried to open many a door with the simplest of instructions like "WET PAINT" or "USE OTHER DOOR" because my basic cultural training in this area had a different slant.

Furthermore, since language can be used for many different purposes--i.e., entertaining, dispensing information, narrating, and evaluating--and cultures do not seem to capitalize on the same emphasis, learners must be helped to organize their language skills accordingly. Since being succint in the act of dispensing information is the elan vital of English use, summarization of ideas becomes a necessary prerequisite to effectively communicate. Speakers from languages where redundancy is a commonly accepted feature--e.g., the frequent use of superlatives, hand gsetures and double negatives in Spanish--will probably have difficulty being "language efficient". Activities reinforcing summarization are doubly significant for these learners (emphasis added).

In assuming that all ESL learners already master the strategies used, teachers compound the challenges inherent to the language lesson by adding another unknown factor, the cultural medium. Therefore, concurrent training in the use of inquiry, problem solving, sequencing, following directions, and summarization techniques must take place in the teaching of English as a second language.

The above discussion does not aim at precluding the systematic presentation of analytic skills. However, the

following orientation is suggested in dealing with the language systems of English:

Phonemic and not phonic differences must be emphasized. Due consideration should be granted to intonation patterns, stress, and juncture; most especially in the light of the increasing number of ESL learners who come from a tonal language background--e.g., the Vietnamese and the Chinese.

Emphasis must also be placed on morphemic rules which have a tremendous generative power. For instance, once the second language speakers internalize that by adding the suffix -able to a verb a new word is created, meaning "capable of being+verb"--e.g.,likeable, readable, punishable--they are in command of a method which can produce a large repertoire of words.

A further consideration is the role of morphological and syntactic errors as a valid and significant hypothesis testing stages in language and cultural development and not as mistakes to be avoided.

In addition, lexicon should reflect the language that native speakers really use including colloquialisms and dialectal variations. A quick look at a local newspaper's sports page serves as evidence of the language native speakers really use:"FROGS STICK HOGS 32-31" or "RICE MISTAKES GIFT-WRAP TEXAS" or "CRASH LANDING AT AGGIELAND." I often wonder who won.

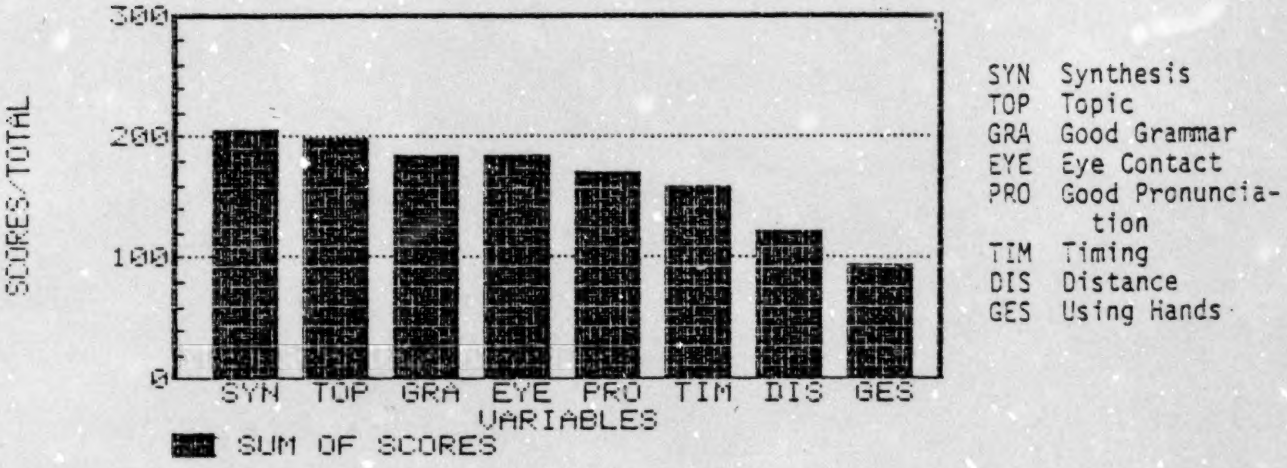
Lastly, proxemics and kinesics must also be included as language components since a large percent of communicative events take place non-verbally. Since neither system has transcultural meaning, special attention should be devoted to the development of these functional skills.

THE "FUNCTIONAL SKILLS SURVEY"

In order to research the possibilities for a scope and sequence of cultural skills, the "Functional Skills Survey" was administered to a random sample of 36 bilingual and monolingual speakers of English. The findings suggest the possibility of a hierarchy of cultural and linguistic skills affecting communicative performance and classroom success. This hierarchy is not indicative of a natural order of skills but of the degree of urgency of acquisition. An average ranking of sample responses produced the information reported on tables 2 and 3.

In contrasting the bilingual and the monolingual samples, a few differences can be observed. The bilingual group seems to place more value on language skills--i.e., phonology and grammar, in that order--than the monolingual counterpart. This difference may stem from having had first hand experience with the process of learning a second language and perceiving the language items as interwoven with culture. Furthermore, topic of conversation rates higher in importance among bilinguals than among monolinguals. This finding might be due to the fact that monolinguals did not see topic of conversation as culturally-bound phenomena;

SKILLS INFLUENCING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

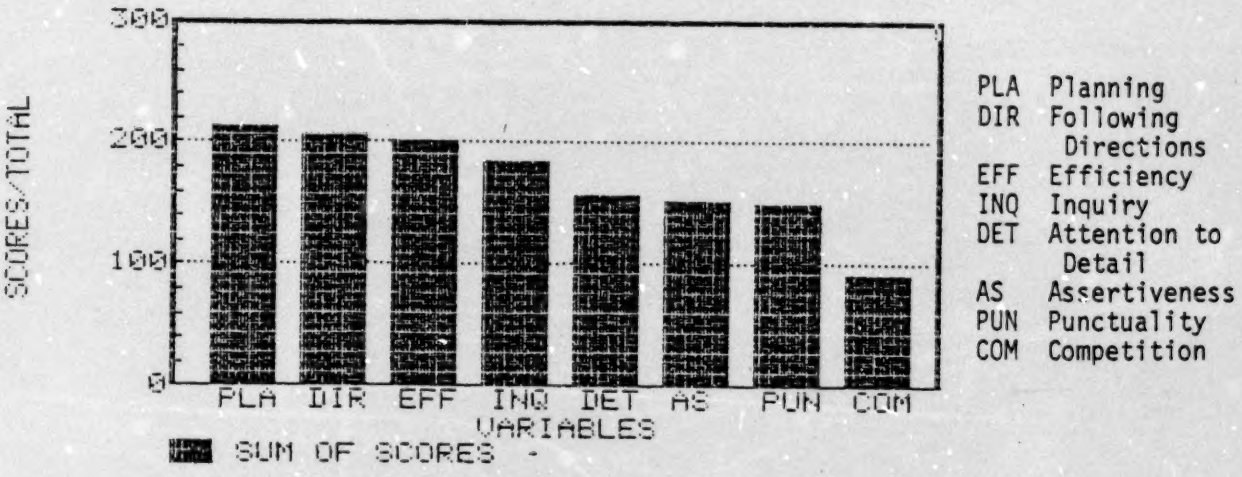


RANKING OF SKILLS FROM MOST IMPORTANT TO LEAST IMPORTANT AS INDICATED BY THE TOTAL SAMPLE:

SKILLS	ARITHMETIC MEAN
SYNTHESIS	5.72
TOPIC OF CONVERSATION	5.5
PROPER GRAMMAR	5.14
EYE CONTACT	5.11
PROPER PRONUNCIATION	4.78
TIMING	4.42
DISTANCE	3.42
HAND GESTURES	2.64

FIGURE 2

SKILLS INFLUENCING CLASSROOM SUCCESS



RANKING OF SKILLS FROM MOST IMPORTANT TO LEAST IMPORTANT AS INDICATED BY THE TOTAL SAMPLE:

SKILLS	ARITHMETIC MEAN
PLANNING	5.92
FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS	5.72
EFFICIENCY	5.61
INQUIRY	5.17
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	4.39
ASSERTIVENESS	4.25
PUNCTUALITY	4.17
COMPETITION	2.53

FIGURE 3

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whereas the bilinguals are aware that as one changes languages, subject matters change accordingly. The rest of the functional skills are rated quite similarly. (Refer to figures 2 and 3).

Although the findings reported are not conclusive the possibility of a hierarchy of functional skills might lead to a relevant scope and sequence of cultural behaviors which may precipitate the acculturation of the learner. Subsequent research in this area will be necessary in order to test the hypothesis suggested by the findings.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The preceding study concludes that:

1. Emphasis on mechanical skills does not equip the second language learners with the necessary dexterity to function in the second language. Since the communicative experience involves the manipulation of specific cultural items, the ESL curriculum should provide for their systematic presentation and evaluation..

2. The Cultural Proficiency Model provides a theoretical basis for the integration of cultural skills in the language classroom. The open-ended spiral accounts for awareness, understanding, selection, evaluation, and refinement of functional behaviors.

3. The data collected from the "Functional Skills Survey" suggest the possibility of a hierarchy of functional skills affecting communication and classroom success. This

hierarchy is not indicative of a natural order but of the degree of urgency of acquisition. Subsequent research in this area might lead to a relevant scope and sequence of cultural behaviors to be introduced in the ESL classroom.

and 4. In order to hasten the process of acculturation, second language learners must be taught not only to utter sounds and phrases but also "how to behave" in the language as well. Parental awareness and attitudes must be taken into consideration in order to promote home involvement and support.

In the United States, we have reduced the privilege of learning a second language to children who are already fortunate to speak another. I would like to see the day when our monolingual English speaking children have the enriching opportunity to learn the language and thoughts of other worlds.

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